

introduction



Photo: Steve Delaney

As we celebrate the arrival of a new millennium, we are also heralding the 30th anniversary of Earth Day and the 30th birthday of the EPA. It seems an appropriate time to look at the victories we have won and the challenges that lie ahead.

As we close out the 20th century, we can be proud that efforts to protect and enhance our environment are paying substantial dividends. In fact, the environmental protection movement has been arguably the most effective public policy initiative of our generation. Throughout New England, the air we breathe is cleaner, the water we drink and play in is healthier and the land we live on is safer.

Evidence of our success is at the doorstep of New England's hub. Fifteen years ago, Boston Harbor was among the nation's dirtiest. Today, after billions of dollars of investment, eight miles of beaches are open to swimmers, seals and porpoises have returned and the harbor's commercial lobster and shellfish industry is contributing more than \$10 million annually to the local economy.

We've made great strides not just in Boston Harbor but across New England. Our rivers have been transformed from veritable sewers to recreational havens for anglers, boaters and tourists. River fronts, too, have been transformed into bikeways, parks and greenways. And in all corners of the region, we're breathing cleaner air no longer tainted by lead.

As we enter the new millennium, we need to be mindful, despite our success, that the environmental protection job is far from done. Moreover, we must recognize that the strategies that have brought us so much over the past 30 years need to be constantly refined in order to meet new and changing circumstances. To that end, EPA New England, in concert with our many partners, has developed a set of new and promising initiatives.

Central to these new strategies is forging strong alliances with those who live in the communities we're working hard to protect. This collaborative approach has proven particularly effective in densely-populated urban areas—communities which have, frankly, been under-served by EPA in the past.

One example is the Clean Charles 2005 initiative. By bringing together a diverse coalition of environmental groups, state and municipal agencies, businesses, universities and others who live and work near the Charles River, we have made enormous progress in achieving our goal of making the lower Charles River fishable and swimmable by Earth Day 2005.

We're also applying this teamwork approach to businesses, public agencies, universities and others that EPA regulates. By using new technologies and old fashioned Yankee ingenuity, EPA and our partners can often help these institutions prevent pollution well before it becomes a problem—and at much less cost to consumers and taxpayers alike.

Market-based pollution trading programs represent another promising, innovative environmental initiative. In Manchester, NH and Wayland, MA, for example, EPA New England has worked with elected representatives, environmentalists, business leaders and community activists to achieve greater reductions in pollution at significantly less cost than would have been achieved through traditional regulatory approaches.

None of these collaborative or market-based solutions will work, however, without the use of a more traditional weapon in our arsenal—strong enforcement actions against those who fundamentally seek to ignore their environmental obligations. We have made this clear from Pittsfield, MA, in our case against General Electric for polluting the Housatonic River, to Cape Cod where we have issued three unprecedented orders halting training and requiring cleanup work at the Massachusetts Military Reservation which has endangered part of the Cape's sole source drinking water aquifer.

As we enter the new millennium, we should remind ourselves of the values and traditions that make New England so unique. Among those traditions is New England's long history of active citizen involvement. EPA New England places enormous value on this tradition and has actively fostered and nurtured public involvement in all of its programs. We hope that this report will galvanize even greater participation in our environmental protection efforts.